


North Carolina



Promoting a Childhood Healthy Weight Initiative by Improving Nutrition and Physical Activity

Public Health Problem

The percentage of children who are overweight in the United States doubled during the past two decades, and the percentage among adolescents almost tripled. Data from the North Carolina Nutrition and Physical Activity Surveillance System show an even greater increase in the state. Between 1995 and 2000, the prevalence of overweight increased by 36% in preschool children, 40% in school-aged children, and 14% in adolescents.

Evidence That Prevention Works

Research has demonstrated that preventive measures such as improved nutrition, tobacco cessation, increased physical activity, and early detection and intervention may prevent heart disease, stroke, and other chronic diseases. Healthy eating behaviors lower the risk for many chronic diseases, including obesity, heart disease, stroke, some types of cancer, diabetes, and osteoporosis. By establishing healthy eating and physical activity habits early in life, children are more likely to carry these habits into adulthood.

Program Example

Funded by CDC, the North Carolina Healthy Weight Initiative is the coordinating group for issues related to healthy weight, nutrition, and physical activity for the state's children. Through this initiative, North Carolina developed a comprehensive state plan focused on children aged 2–18 years. The North Carolina initiative is enhancing the state's pediatric nutrition surveillance system and is implementing programs designed to improve the nutrition and physical activity behaviors of young children and their families. Launched in the fall of 2002, the plan, *Moving Our Children Toward a Healthy Weight: Finding the Will and the Way*, calls for a multilevel approach to reducing the number of overweight and obese children. It focuses not only on behavioral and interpersonal change, but also on the organizational, community, and societal changes necessary to support healthy eating habits and increased physical activity for children, teens, and their families. North Carolina is also enhancing its pediatric nutrition surveillance system to better monitor trends in body mass index and selected dietary and physical activity behaviors. In addition, a pilot intervention in eight counties throughout the state targets children aged 2–5 who are enrolled in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) or the Child and Adult Care Food Program. This program uses policy, environmental interventions, and educational programs to reach staff members and families with important health messages.

Implications

The North Carolina initiative uses strong partnerships to enhance the state's overall capacity to mobilize nutrition and physical activity promotion efforts and reduce the number of children who are overweight. This program demonstrates the importance of a coordinated approach, which entails collaboration among partners both internal and external to the North Carolina Division of Public Health.

Contact Information